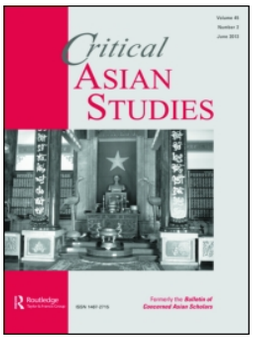

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Comments on Cham Population Figures

All Cambodian population statistics, of whatever period, include a large measure of hypothesis, assumption, extrapolation, and pure guesswork, and they may not be adequate for the type of calculations undertaken by either Kiernan or myself.

by Michael Vickery

Ben Kiernan's "Orphans of Genocide: The Cham Muslims of Kampuchea under Pol Pot" (*BCAS* vol. 20, no. 4, Oct.–Dec. 1988) is an interesting study of the experience of the Chams during 1975–79, and as such makes a valuable contribution to the still too little known social history of Democratic Kampuchea (DK). Unfortunately Kiernan has tinkered with the statistics in a tendentious manner in an attempt to prove the case for genocide in Democratic Kampuchea.

I feel obliged to undertake the following explanation, for as a reader of this article before publication I warned both *BCAS* and Kiernan personally about the dubious nature of the figures included, and I do not wish other readers, who may realize that I was involved, to imagine that I supported the way in which statistics were used. Notwithstanding what follows, a warning I have issued before cannot be overemphasized. *All Cambodian population statistics, of whatever period*, include a large measure of hypothesis, assumption, extrapolation, and pure guesswork, and they may not be adequate for the type of calculations undertaken by either Kiernan or myself.

In essence the charge of genocide is based on a decrease in the Cham population from 250,000 in 1975 to 173,000 in 1979, a drop of about 30 percent, clearly catastrophic. Now what are the sources for these figures?

On page 2 Kiernan writes, "in 1970...200,000...Chams lived in Kampuchea," and on page 6 it is said that in 1936 "the Chams were estimated to total 88,000, and by 1975, 250,000. By 1979 their numbers would normally have reached at least 260,000." This is footnoted (n. 38) to Marcel Ner who adjusted the 1936 census figure of 73,000 to 88,000, the grounds for which should be presented to the reader. There are thus two potential base figures for the period in question, 73,000 from the census of 1936, and an enhancement of it, 88,000, the reasons for which remain obscure.

The later figures for 1970 and 1975, however, do not represent any kind of count, nor were they ever anyone's estimate at any time. They are Kiernan's own calculations derived from a "population growth of 2.7 percent per annum, a rate *suggested* [my emphasis—MV] by...J. Migozzi...", but which Kiernan, *in contrast to Migozzi*, has applied throughout 1936–75.

What about the 173,000 in 1979? This is even more obscure.

Not until page 30, note 115, does Kiernan tell us that the Cham population in 1982 was just over 182,200. This is the *only* figure since 1936 that is based on any kind of real count, and as will be clear below it is central to all calculations of the Cham population after 1970, first of all for the crucial figure of 173,000, which is not a count, but *a back extrapolation* from 182,200 based on an assumed per annum growth rate of 3 percent; and even then it is wrong.[1] Moreover, the number of Cham said to have remained in Cambodia after the refugee exodus, and on which further calculations must be based is given as 161,350. This raises a further difficulty, for it would require an average annual rate of 4.134 percent to raise that total to 182,200 in three years, a rate of increase impossible in Cambodia's conditions.[2]

An honest case for any type of inference about quantitative trends, including genocide, must start with the most accurate possible figures for base years, whereas Kiernan's 250,000 for

1. Kiernan, note 115, says that 173,000 is the total of a figure of 161,350 implied by a steady 3 percent per annum increase from 1979 to reach 182,000 by 1982, *plus* 11,700 Cham who can be counted as having fled abroad, and who thus must not figure in subsequent calculations of the post-1979 population. As it stands this is incoherent arithmetic. It would require a 1979 total of 166,730 to attain 182,200 in 1982 with a rate of 3 percent.

2. See Vickery, "How Many Died in Pol Pot's Kampuchea?" *BCAS* vol. 20, no. 1 (Jan.–Mar. 1988), pp. 70–73.

1975, as will be seen, is a large exaggeration, originally an extrapolation into the future based on expectations about future conditions that proved to be totally inaccurate.

Then, if Migozzi is to be cited, as he should be, as the most serious demographic study of prewar Cambodia,[3] he must be cited accurately. One of the conclusions of his study was that the standard rate of annual population increase of 2.2 percent that had been applied to the 1962 census data (the first and so far only complete census of the entire country) was too low, and the revised rates implied by his population estimates were 2.65 percent for 1955–60, 2.83 percent for 1960–65, and 2.95 percent for 1965–70, not the generalized 2.7 percent that Kiernan used. These new rates, it must be emphasized, were only for the good years of the 1950s and 1960s, and his estimates for all years before 1955 were below 2 percent, and for the 1930s and 1940s well below.[4] The average rate suggested by Migozzi for the *1960s*, not for the entire period treated by Kiernan, was 2.9 percent, apparently based on the post-1955 figures cited above and his *projected hypothetical future* rate of increase of over 3 percent for years after 1970 (Migozzi, pp. 207, 212).

Thus honest use of Migozzi's data would not raise 88,000 to 250,000, but to 185,300 in 1970, the last year of Migozzi's own observations, and to 216,000 by 1975. Moreover, the 1975 total assumes normal peacetime conditions, for Migozzi finished his work at the very beginning of the war of 1970–75, and his calculations beyond 1970 do not take its disastrous effects into account. Not only have war losses generally been estimated at over half a million, but Migozzi's high rate of projected annual growth of over 3 percent for 1970–75, based on expectations of continuing improvement in diet, health care, and general living standard, is no longer applicable.

In fact all demographic work on post-1970 Cambodia has suggested that the population as a whole stagnated, with an average annual increase of less than 1 percent per annum up to April 1975;[5] and an estimate of the Cham population in 1975, even assuming Ner's estimate as a starting point, should not exceed about 191,500, that is the 185,300 that my use of Migozzi's projections, starting with 88,000 in 1936, produces for 1970 increased to 1975 by the same rate as has been accepted by demographers for the population as a whole. Indeed, because much of the Cham population lived in areas that were heavily bombed, their loss of life during the war of 1970–75 may have been relatively greater than that of the Cambodian population as a whole.

Had Kiernan just stuck to this, Ner's base figure plus honest use of Migozzi's rates of increase, he could have made a better case for serious Cham population loss, from approximately 191,500 in 1975 to the 173,000 in 1979 that he derived from the PRK[6] count of 182,200 in 1982, although it might not have supported a case for genocide. Even then his 1979 figure, as we have seen, could be questioned. As I have explained elsewhere,[7] a steady 3 percent per annum increase after 1979 is unrealistically high, which means that an estimate for 1979 survivors should be somewhat higher than any figure based on a 3 percent or more rate of increase after 1979.

Moreover, Migozzi's own estimate of the Cham population (Migozzi, p. 42), which must be dealt with if he is cited, gave the "Islamic minority" only 150,000 in 1970, implying an average annual increase from Ner's 88,000 of only 1.58 percent since 1936. Such a dramatic discrepancy between an implied growth rate for the Cham and Migozzi's explicit expansion of the entire population also suggests Ner was in error, and would require an explanation, of which there is no hint in Migozzi's work.

The reason is obviously that Migozzi did not accept Ner's revised estimate, for Migozzi's rough figure of 150,000 (actually 153,000 plus) may be calculated with his rates of increase for the entire population starting from the 73,000 estimate of Cham population in 1936. Moreover, the figure of 150,000 occurs in a context in which Migozzi was criticizing official Cambodian figures for minorities as too low, and he seems to have considered his own 150,000 total as a new higher estimate, presented along with his revised higher estimates for Chinese and Vietnamese.

Migozzi's rejection of Ner's higher figure for 1936 puts it in doubt, for Migozzi is considered to have been the most thorough demographer working in Cambodia before the war; and this makes it even more necessary for someone who wishes to use Ner to provide some indication of his methods of work.

Thus following Migozzi we should accept the lower 1936 estimate (73,000), and an approximate total of 153,000 in 1970, which would have increased to only about 158,100 by April 1975.[8] Then the Cambodian population as a whole, and including the Cham, is considered to have decreased during the DK

3. Jacques Migozzi, *Cambodge, faits et problèmes de population* (Paris: CNRS, 1973); Michael Vickery, *Kampuchea: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Frances Pinter, 1986), chap. 1, n. 2.

4. Migozzi, *Cambodge*, p. 269, tableau 43, column E2, which he considered the most likely estimates. I have calculated the rates of increase shown here from Migozzi's figures for total population.

5. National Foreign Assessment Center [CIA], "Kampuchea: a Demographic Catastrophe," Washington, D.C., May 1980; Vickery, "Democratic Kampuchea: CIA to the Rescue," *BCAS* vol. 14, no. 4 (Oct.–Dec. 1982), pp. 45–54; Meng-Try Ea, "Recent Population Trends in Kampuchea," in David A. Ablin and Marlowe Hood, eds., *The Cambodian Agony* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1987), pp. 3–15. Meng-Try illustrates three separate estimates: UN, U.S. Bureau of the Census (based on the CIA), and his own calculations, all agreeing on stagnation during 1970–75 (see pp. 5–6). He also accepts up to 700,000 war-related deaths, and cites three other works offering the same estimate (note 8). The CIA accepted the same figure. Note that in all these sources it is the 1974 figure that should be used for the end of that year and early 1975, for their 1975 figures all represent extrapolations for mid-1975 following the DK victory and are biased in ways that I described in Vickery, "Democratic Kampuchea: CIA to the Rescue." A difference between the calculations of Meng-Try and the CIA is that Meng-Try started with a 1970 figure of 100,000 more and did not figure in "approximately 600,000 violent deaths during the war" (p. 6, note 2); and the annual average growth rates for 1970–April 1975 implied respectively by Meng-Try and the CIA are .070823 percent and .095645 percent. In my calculations below I shall arbitrarily take a figure in between, .083 percent.

6. PRK is People's Republic of Kampuchea, the name of the new state set up in 1979. In 1989 the official name was changed to State of Kampuchea.

7. See Vickery, "How Many Died."

8. In my *Kampuchea* (1986), chap. 1, note 2, I was in error in increasing Migozzi's 150,000 of 1970 by his average 2.9 percent until 1975, giving 173,000 for that year. I did not then take into account that 2.9 percent was strictly a peacetime rate of growth.

period, which means that in 1979, based on Migozzi's figures and the general decrease in the entire population, there could not have been more than 149,250 Cham, a number which could not possibly have increased to 182,200 by 1982.[9]

Even if we increase 158,100 by Kiernan's hypothesized 1 percent per annum during 1975–79, which in itself is in total disaccord with all other hypotheses, this gives only 164,500 in January 1979, which would still require an impossible rate of increase of nearly 3.5 percent to reach 182,200 by 1982.[10]

The above calculations based strictly on Migozzi must therefore be wrong, for they cannot be made compatible with the living PRK Cham population, which, I again emphasize, is the only datum based on any kind of real count, particularly if the Cham population during 1975–79 is calculated as having diminished along with the Cambodian population as a whole.[11] This means that Ner may perhaps be rehabilitated, whatever his methods were.

If we subject the 185,000 total resulting from Ner's assumption plus Migozzi's rates up to 1970 to standard demographic treatments of the evolution of Cambodia's population since that date we get 191,200 for April 1975. Then using my conclusions about the total population after 1975, the Cham total would have fallen to about 180,490 in 1979. And this, diminished by 11,700 Cham who fled abroad (Kiernan, note 115), leaves 168,790 to theoretically increase to 182,200 in 1982. In fact, it works out rather well, showing an average annual increase of 2.58 percent, which although optimistic, is not totally incompatible with Cambodia's post-1979 conditions.[12] A rough figure of 168,000 plus is the *absolute minimum* that can be postulated for 1979 survivors. Any lower figure requires an impossibly high growth rate to reach the PRK count in 1982.

Thus Ner's modification of the 1936 census may be accepted, and Migozzi's estimate of the Cham population rejected, if Kiernan's own calculations are thrown out, and in fact they must be rejected whatever base figure is adopted.

For what *cannot* be accepted, on the basis of any real figures, is that "over one-third of the Cham, about 90,000 people [250,000 − 173,000 = 77,000 *plus* 10,000 born during DK] perished" (Kiernan, p. 30),[13] for there had never been 250,000 to begin with. Moreover, Kiernan spoils his case for legal genocide with his postulation of a "growth rate of 1 percent per year" for the Cham during DK. This would be better than the situation of the majority Khmer population, which declined absolutely over the same period.

Kiernan has diminished the interest of an otherwise valuable historical study by fiddling with statistics to prove a particular political case, which cannot be made. On the contrary, if the Cham population increased during the DK period by 1 percent per annum while the population as a whole was decreasing absolutely, the Cham were slightly less victimized than the majority Khmer.

Although we may all sympathize with efforts to call attention to the cruel and destructive features of the DK system, it is important for scholars writing in scholarly journals to stick to the greatest possible accuracy, particularly when writing on the Left, which in the United States is faced with scurrilous attacks in any case. Propaganda, and doctored evidence to support it, however laudable the cause, must be left to the journos and Washington regime agents.

The "DK genocide case" in particular is an effort that could easily backfire. Not only is it likely that in a fair trial DK would be acquitted of the technical charge of genocide, but many of the people who have been pushing it most energetically in the United States have an ulterior motive, linking the PRK to DK and destroying the former with the accusations of genocide against the latter.[14] This type of propaganda has come to the fore with particular emphasis now that the Vietnamese have withdrawn their troops from Cambodia and deprived Cambodia's enemies of that reason to oppose Phnom Penh.[15] For those of us sympathetic to the State of Kampuchea (former PRK), it would be better to drop the loaded and legalistic term "genocide," and concentrate on mass murder and war crimes, for which it would be easy to prove the DK leadership guilty, if they ever came to trial.

It is also clear now that however much exposure DK cruelty receives, the attitude of the Pol Pot–backed George Bush regime will not be affected. The mask has been torn aside, and as I began suggesting seven years ago, U.S. regimes since at least 1977 have seen the utility of DK as a weapon against Vietnam.[16]

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9. Such an increase would have required a per annum rate of about 4.7 percent, quite impossible in prevailing conditions. See Vickery, *Cambodia 1975–1982* (Hempstead, England: Allen and Unwin; and Boston: South End Press, 1984), pp. 184–88; and Vickery, "How Many Died." The estimate of an absolute decrease of about 400,000 implies a percentage decrease of about 5.6 percent from 1975 to 1979. My estimate in *Cambodia*, made at a time when a DK execution toll of 2–3,000,000 was popular in the press, seems now to have been accepted.

10. See Vickery, "How Many Died."

11. As another warning about the nature of some of the official and semiofficial statistics, we should take note of "the apparently official figure given to Ben Kiernan by a Cham official...near Phnom Penh in January 1986" of 185,000 Cham at that time (cited in Vickery, *Kampuchea*, p. 2 and n. 2). This implies an annual growth rate between 1982 and 1986 of half of one percent (0.51 percent), which is certainly wrong.

12. See Vickery, *Cambodia*, pp. 184–88; and "How Many Died."

13. How 10,000 births may be treated as losses is beyond my comprehension, but it is of a piece with Kiernan's counting as losses people who never existed.

14. William Shawcross, "The End of Cambodia?" *New York Review of Books*, 24 January 1980, and "The Burial of Cambodia," *New York Review of Books*, 10 May 1984; Elizabeth Becker, series of articles in the *Washington Post*, 28 February and 1 March 1983; and David Hawk in collusion with the *Index on Censorship in 1986*. In all of these cases authors and publishers colluded in censorship of material sent to them to refute the specious charges, or implications, of DK-PRK leadership identity.

15. Douglas Pike, "Khmer Rouge: Not the Threat It Was," *New York Times*, 5 August 1989; Kenneth Conboy, "Testimony before the East Asian and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee," 2 October 1989; Tommy T.B. Koh, "Hanoi's Role in Cambodia" [5th Column], *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 October 1989; Thach Saren, "Does Anybody Care?" *Washington Post*, 30 October 1989.

16. Vickery, "Democratic Kampuchea: CIA to the Rescue."

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